

# Shaping debate?

## Assessment of Minibuzz



### Key Findings

- 26% of Tanzanians have watched Minibuzz.
- The topics from the show are often discussed among viewers.
- 85% of the viewers say that Minibuzz provides them with useful and practical information.
- Media experts conclude that the show reaches its intended target group and that it amplifies the voice of people who are usually not heard in the public debate on topical issues.

### Introduction

Most Tanzanians are dissatisfied with the current level of public service delivery, but only a minority takes direct action for change; furthermore, many Tanzanians feel that their opinions are not heard and that it is a useless battle to try to influence policy makers.<sup>1</sup> In this context, giving prime-time space to the views of ordinary people is critical to building confidence among the citizenry that their voices count. One such approach is the Tanzanian TV show, *Minibuzz*. The show is a daily current affairs program that is running on its fourth year with the very purpose of stimulating citizen debate and to provide a space for social, economic and political debates among regular Tanzanians. Set in a *dalla dalla* (a commuter mini-bus), the show is a context-sensitive response to the world famous debate shows. *Minibuzz* aims to “stimulate citizen agency by informing and providing space for exchange of views among citizens”.<sup>2</sup>

1. Uwazi, 2012: “What does Dar make of Governance? Perceptions about Services, Policies and Leaders”, Brief no. 2, June, Twaweza Publication series

2. As stated in the Agreement Contract between Twaweza initiative of Hivos Tanzania and MIATV Holding signed on 4 April, 2012, pp. 1

But how successful is *Minibuzz* in living up to these standards, what role does it occupy in the Tanzanian media landscape, and what can we say about the possible effects the show may have on its viewers? This report summarizes the findings from recent studies conducted by Twaweza on the above questions.

## Methodology

The overall aim of the *Minibuzz* assessment was to deepen the understanding of the possible effect of the show on its viewers and on the Tanzanian media space. The exercise consisted of three separate studies, as outlined below. Further details of each study can be obtained by contacting Twaweza ([info@twaweza.org](mailto:info@twaweza.org)).

Assessment of the coverage (i.e., the proportion of the target population that regularly watches the show). This was conducted in June 2013, using a nationally-representative survey of Tanzanians (the “omnibus” survey). The sample size was 2,000 respondents.

Follow-up survey among regular viewers to understand better what they gain from the show, and how they rate the show as compared to the TV news programs. This was conducted in October 2013 among a sub-sample of the respondents from the coverage survey (230 individuals were reached).

A qualitative exercise among Tanzanian media experts to describe their views on the show’s position in the media arena. This was conducted in January 2014 through the use of focus groups and individual in-depth interviews.

## Main findings

### ***What proportion of Tanzanians watches Minibuzz?***

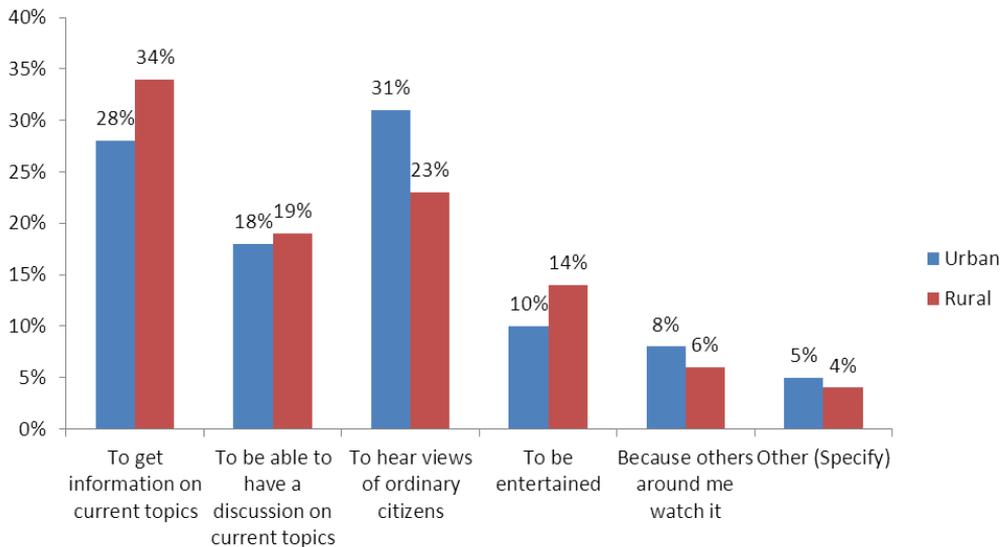
According to the survey results, *Minibuzz* has been watched by 26% of Tanzanians. Of these, 41% reported having watched the show once per week or more in the month before the survey.

### ***Who are the viewers of Minibuzz?***

Most regular viewers (64%) live in urban settings; the proportion of people who have never seen the show is higher in rural areas (85%) as compared to urban areas (47%). These figures likely reflect the hypothesis that TV viewership overall is higher in urban as compared to rural areas. Interestingly, the data from the follow-up survey suggest that for rural viewers the show is used slightly more as a means of gaining access to current topics whereas the urban population is more likely to watch the show to hear the views of ordinary citizens (see Figure 1). There were no noticeable differences between male and female respondents (data not shown).

The show is appealing to a wide spectrum of age groups, with a larger proportion of viewers aged between 18 and 29 years. The primary reasons for watching to show vary across age groups: whereas 24% of citizens in the age group of 50-54 watch the show in order to be entertained, only 6% of 18-19 year olds watch the show for this reason. Here, 44% watch the show in order to obtain information on current topics.

**Figure 1: Respondents' motivations for watching the Minibuzz show**



Nationally representative survey; July 2013; n=2000.

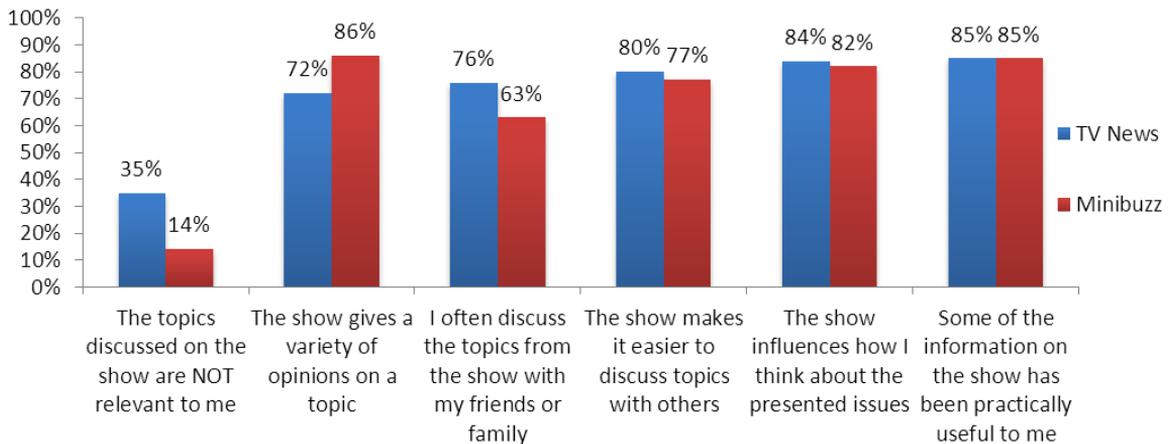
### **What do viewers gain from Minibuzz? What does it contribute to the Tanzanian media space?**

Through the coverage survey we found out that less than 15% of respondents reported watching the show for purely entertainment purposes, while about one-third reported watching it in order to be informed, and another one-third in order to hear the views of ordinary citizens (see Figure 1). We wanted to dig deeper into how useful the show is to viewers and how it is perceived among media experts.

In the follow-up survey of viewers, respondents were asked to rate the quality and relevance of two shows: *Minibuzz*, and, for comparison, any TV news program they frequently watch. The choice of comparison was not easy, as we sought a show that was established, influential, informative, and wide-reaching. The result (shown in Figure 2) showed that 86% of respondents rated the topics on *Minibuzz* as very relevant, whereas 65% reported the same for their preferred TV news broadcast. At 85%, *Minibuzz* was rated equally as high as the TV news in terms of practical use of the information received.



**Figure 2: Rating of *Minibuzz* and TV news on selected characteristics**



*Follow-up survey among viewers; October 2013; n=230.*

A further 63% of respondents answered that they often discuss the topics from the show with friends and family. Though a higher proportion reported discussing topics from the TV news (76%), *Minibuzz* was rated as high as the news in terms of facilitating discussion with friends and family, influencing how respondents think about debated issues, and the practical usefulness of the information presented. When asked about taking any action as a direct result of watching either show, 44% of the respondents answered affirmatively regarding the TV news, and 28% regarding *Minibuzz* (data not shown). It would have been interesting to query the nature of the actions taken, but it ought to be noted that *Minibuzz* offers a reflective approach that seeks to kindle debates that do not necessarily demand immediate action.

When the respondents were asked about what particular parts of *Minibuzz* they like the best, 37% reported the best part to be the topics discussed within the context of the everyday life of people (data not shown). Another 18% reported that what they like the most is the participation of “regular” people. It was only 7% who liked the educational part the best, while another 7% preferred the comic reliefs of the show.

The media experts praised the show for its informal setup, which allows for a large variety of people, who usually do not express their opinions publicly, to share their thoughts on contemporary issues such as service delivery, quality of education, food prices and even traffic jams in Dar es Salaam. They noted this is one of the main components that exemplify the deviance of *Minibuzz* from the more conventional TV news that are often dominated by expert estimations or politically biased opinions. The media expert group also agreed that the show is speaking to a broad audience, is generally easily understood, and that the fundamental entertaining character of the show is a very important ingredient for its success.

The respondents noted that the show probably mostly influences the debates within families and social networks, and voiced some doubts as to the broader reaches of such debates. This is an interesting point for *Minibuzz* to consider: is it fundamentally about promoting debates, or does it wish to become more directive in terms of what practical actions people can take regarding the issues raised. Other suggestions for improvement among the media experts included bringing in an expert panel to make sure that the debates are rooted in facts, and that the female host ought to be given as much space and prominence as the male host (to actively demonstrate gender equality).

## Conclusions and a few recommendations

Findings from the three different measurement exercises suggest that *Minibuzz* has been successful in identifying relevant topics suitable for their target group and prime time television, and has become a popular platform for a variety of different opinions as expressed by regular people with no explicit political agenda. The show appears to contribute to public debate, which is significant in creating awareness of relevant issues and stimulating an active citizenry. It also rates as high as the TV news in several important characteristics (such as relevance and practical usefulness of the topics covered).

- Although we compared *Minibuzz* to the TV news, *Minibuzz* is actually not competing with the news; rather, it seeks to provide an additional source of information and stimulate discussion. *Minibuzz* is *info-tainment*: part information, part entertainment. In this vein, a hypothesis that could be tested in the future is whether *Minibuzz* actually reaches people who do not watch the more “regular” news – therefore bringing information and updates to a population that would otherwise not be reached.
- It would also be relevant for *Minibuzz* to consider how it can more explicitly promote citizen debate. *Minibuzz* has in early 2014 started to experiment with the use of SMS/texting; this ought to be followed closely to understand what effect it has in further promoting citizen participation in public debates.
- Another interesting testing ground for *Minibuzz* might be to focus on a particular topic for a more extended period of time (campaign-style); if combined with a pre - and post-campaign measurement, it could provide interesting evidence whether the show in fact contributes to improved knowledge and a shift in norms.

